A BLIGHT

By ELIZABETH WEED

Edith Wilton combined two marked contradictions. She possessed a lovable disposition, but when she was a baby, through the carelessness of a nurse, she fell and cut her lip, producing a wound that in healing left a scar, giving a very disagreeable expression to her face.

Edith could see in the faces of those she met a repugnance occasioned by her expression. At first she tried to obviate this effect by smiling, but she saw at once by the further recoil of the one looking at her that she was only heightening the disagreeable impression. Such physical blights usually have one of two effects, either the blighted person is unconscious of the defect or becomes painfully sensitive concerning it. Edith was of the latter class. She would not go to the social gatherings of her own age. More and more she shrank within herself. Then, becoming conscious that in being a recluse she would be forced into a life of selfishness, she began to devote herself to the poor.

She had friends, girl friends, who sought to draw her out socially. Confidence between young girls is close, while that between opposite sexes, especially at that age, is distant. The young men who met Edith looked upon the expression on her face and turned away with a shrug. Her girl friends had a better opportunity to learn what there was under the misleading expression. When one of her chums was married she insisted on Edith being her bridesmaid. Edith demurred, but her friend would not excuse her.

At the wedding the bridesmaid, looking up suddenly, saw the eyes of a young man she had never seen riveted upon her and without that repelled expression she was accustomed to see. The man was a recent graduate of a medical school. The reason why his face did not reflect any disagreeable expression at her defect was because, being a practitioner, he was used to controlling his features when treating his patients.

But Edith did not know this. She knew only that a man with a kindly face was looking at her without any reference to her defect. And when Dr. Allan Emerson requested an introduction and was presented to her her heart fairly bounded within her. Not for an instant while he chatted with her did he seem conscious of her blight. And she, being made to feel that it was inconsequential, rose above it so far as to display the real attractiveness and worth that were in her.

And yet the reason of the young doctor's desire to make her acquaintance was that very defect. He had been observing her before she had noticed him and with a professional eye had been watching the effect of her scar upon the various expressions that flitted across her face. Some physicians, rough in manner, though they may be invaluable helpers to the afflicted, would not have scrupled to betray the real object of their interest. Emerson was of a different kind. He not only concealed his own thoughts for professional reasons, but from an innate sense of delicacy.

Whatever be the exact analysis of his feelings, the act produced a marked impression upon Edith Wilton. A man whose personnel, whose bearing, was far above the average had not only failed to show any repugnance at her defect, but had asked to be introduced to her and chatted with her, displaying unusual interest in her without seeming to be conscious that there was any difference between her and other girls, unless to her advantage. But when he asked her if he might not call upon her the cup of her delight was full.

A few months after the meeting Dr. Emerson asked Edith to be his wife. When she had accepted him he mentioned for the first time her defect, letting her know that he believed he could remove at least its effects.

"Why," said Edith, "didn't you remove it before proposing to me?"

"Because, sweetheart," he replied, "these stupid men who have been passing you by would have learned of your real worth, and the field would have been full of rivals."

There was more in her eyes than in her words when she replied, "You know very well that none of them were to be feared by you."

But Edith dreaded lest in case an operation were not successful her lover might find himself tied through life to a blighted woman and unhappiness for both would result. She therefore insisted on having the operation performed and if the trouble were removed the marriage to take place afterward. Dr. Emerson demurred to this, saying that whether the operation were or were not a success he would not give her up. Both stood firmly on the ground that they had taken, but the man, since the result would be the same to him in any event, finally yielded.

The operation was merely a matter of delicate handling, its only object being to produce a certain result of facial expression. Dr. Emerson performed it himself, covering the wound he made with a piece of skin from the arm of another person. When the whole had healed and the bandages were removed, though the scar remained, the expression on the face had entirely changed.

Dr. Emerson is facetious in his remarks upon how he kept rivals from the girl he wanted and whom as his wife he considers a treasure.

A Ring at The Doorbell

By LOUISE IDA ROSS

Mr. and Mrs. Trevor were sitting one October evening before a blazing wood fire—they had not yet lighted the furnace—and the room was aglow and redolent with the pleasant odor of burning wood. The children had been romping, Mr. Trevor carrying Bennie pigaback and Willie on all fours, but their mother had now taken them all, including the girls, up to bed, tucked them in, kissed them good night and had returned with her sewing, which she was doing by the big lamp on the table, while Mr. Trevor read a magazine.

There was a ring at the bell.

Now, for many years there was something in the ring of his doorbell that cast a sober look over Samuel Trevor's face. But to explain the reason for this it is necessary to go back to the time when he was a very young man.

When he was but eighteen his father, who was a lumber merchant, sent his son to a lumber camp that he might learn the business which would one day be his, from the beginning. There is danger to all persons of that age of inexperience and recklessness that they may make a mesalliance, and on that account it is a bad plan to take them away from young girls of their own social circle and place them among their inferiors. And where would a young man of refinement find people more his inferiors than in a lumber camp? Among the girls there was Madge Hopkins, the daughter of a lumberman, several years older than Trevor, who lured him into indiscretions with her, then threatened him with vengeance if he refused to marry her. He did so, but immediately left the camp.

An effort was made to annul the marriage, but it was unsuccessful. Then the woman offered to refrain from troubling her husband if his father would support her. Remittances were sent regularly for a season, when suddenly a newspaper was received containing a notice of her death. No doubt was felt of the truth of the notice when several years had passed and, no remittances having been sent, no demand was made for them.

Twelve years after the conclusion of this episode Samuel Trevor married Agatha Beach. He told her all about it before being engaged to her, not expressing a doubt that his first wife was dead. "You may be sure of that," said Agatha, "or she would be drawing the lifeblood out of you." Nevertheless Trevor, having had nothing but the death notice to prove to him Madge Hopkins' demise, never felt absolutely sure. And that was the reason why a certain dread was connected with the ringing of his doorbell.

A maid in a neat uniform of black and white went to the door, and the wife and husband heard a woman's coarse voice ask for Mr. Trevor. Then, without waiting to be announced, the caller brushed past the maid and into the sitting room.

"Hello, Sam!" she said.

Trevor put his hands to his face and trembled. It was Madge Hopkins, and, judging from her appearance, she had been growing coarser with every year.

Mrs. Trevor ran to her husband and put her arms about him as if to shield him from the blow.

"Y' needn't be afraid o' me," said the woman, "if you'll give me somethin' to live on."

"Why did I receive that notice of your death?" faltered Trevor.

"I ain't got nothin' to do with that. I ain't got nothin' to live on. Send them remittances that was dropped and I'll let y' alone."

"Mamma!" cried the oldest daughter, a girl of ten, from above. "What's the matter?"

"Leave your address and go," said Trevor, eager to get the woman out of the house before the children should learn who she was.

The address was given, and the woman went away. Then after a silence Mr. Trevor said:

"Don't worry on my account, dearie. My position is not pleasant, but what is it compared with the interest of you and the children? Be comforted. We will keep the secret. Send the remittances regularly and no one will be the wiser."

But Mrs. Trevor had no intention of letting the matter rest where it was. A shrewd woman, she believed that there had been some weak spot in Madge Hopkins' record which was accountable for the spurious death notice and the failure to claim the remittances.

It was but a week after this, when Trevor came home one evening from business, that his wife received him with a radiant countenance that boded good news. Taking him to a room where the children would not hear and closing the door, she said:

"It's all right. I put a detective on her track, and he has been here this afternoon to report. The woman has never been Madge Hopkins since you have known her. She was secretly married before you met her to a lumber shover—whatever that is—and, he drifting away, she took you in. But after you left he returned and claimed her. She lived with him; but, fearing if you appeared in their lives she would be tried for bigamy, she sent you the notice of her death, which she had inserted in a paper for the purpose, and gave up the remittances. Her husband has recently died, and she came back on you for support."

Feeling a Part

By REGINALD D. HAVEN

"I never did but one good act in my life," said the old counterfeiter. "There wasn't much credit in it to me, but it was productive of a lot of happiness to others. It occurred many years ago, and as I am now a very old man and have a very long, troubled life to look back upon, including several terms in the penitentiary, it stands out from the rest of my acts in odd contrast.

"It was in the summer of 1859 that several of us got together in a northern city and manufactured a number of twenty dollar counterfeit bills. As soon as we had finished the job we destroyed the outfit, divided the bills and started for different parts of the country to put them out on the public, my section being the south. Boarding one of the crack steamers of that day, I started for New Orleans. In order the better to impose on people I dressed myself in ministerial black and wore a white cravat. I had been an actor and could personate a clergyman, or any one else, for that matter, to perfection.

"The main cabin of the steamers running on the Mississippi river in those days, when the table was not set for meals, was occupied principally for gambling. Poker, seven-up, euchre and other games were played, though the parties playing were not large and often two persons only occupied a table. I was sitting on the guards one day when a negro came out of the cabin, wringing his hands.

"'What's the matter, boy?' I asked.

"'Mars' done gone lose me to a niggah trader. Ma wife an' pickaninnies won't nebber see me no mo'.'

"I found that his master, a planter, had taken him to Cairo as his body servant, was returning, had lost all the money he had with him at cards, staked his darky and lost him too. I went into the cabin, where the planter and the trader were settling up, the planter being at the moment occupied in making out a bill of sale for the slave.

"'I beg your pardon, sir,' I said to the planter. 'On account of my vocation I am opposed, of course, to gambling in any form, but I dislike exceedingly the separation of families. I understand that you have lost your negro. I would be pleased to lend you the money to win him back.'

"The gentleman accepted the offer. I brought out some new, crisp bills, just from the press, and the game started anew. It was euchre. I soon saw that the gambler could go on winning from the trader all day if he liked, for the former was perpetrating one of the commonest tricks on him—that is, 'turning jack.' In other words, when he dealt he would always turn up a knave for himself. Seeing this and other cheating, I interfered. I told him that I had learned the game before becoming a clergyman and insisted on taking the planter's place. Since I was backing the latter he was obliged to yield to me in the matter, which he did with a bad grace.

"I had not only learned the game 'before becoming a clergyman,' but all the tricks that went with it and many other games. I walked into that card sharper in a way that opened his eyes. The negro at stake had followed me into the cabin and was standing watching the game with bulging eyes. It was hard for me to keep a straight face, playing as I was, a supposed minister of the gospel, with counterfeit money and doing as neat bits of thimblerigging as had ever been practiced on that palatial steamboat. The negro trader was not a professional card sharper, though he didn't hesitate to cheat the planter, and never dreamed that the somber man before him in a spotless white necktie was placing the cards exactly where he wanted them.

"Of course I soon won the darky for his master. Then I arose from the table, delivered a homily on the sin of gambling and returned to the guards. I was followed by the planter, who said to me:

"'Pe'mit me, suh, to say to yo' that yo're the first man of the cloth that has eveh obtained my unbounded respect, suh. Yo' have saved my boy, suh, from being separated from his wife and children, an act fo' which I would have been to blame. I have sufficient influence, suh, to control a call to the First Baptist church of ——, Mississippi. If yo' will accept it it shall be yo's with a fat salary.'

"I thanked the gentleman for his offer, but declined it. When we reached his landing he insisted so heartily upon my visiting him at his plantation that I consented.

"I was made welcome by his family, and the wife and children of the negro I had saved from the trader came to the house with tears in their eyes to thank me. I was a good looking young fellow in those days and could see that I made an impression on one of the planter's daughters. I had everything at my disposal to perpetrate any rascality I might choose. I could get the planter's indorsement, which would enable me to dispose of my 'green goods,' and I believed I could win his daughter.

"I did neither. For a brief season I enjoyed the sensation of being a fine fellow. During that time I permitted myself to feel the part just as an actor will feel the character he is personating. Then when it was over I departed, resisting with difficulty the reproachful look of the girl who favored me, and as soon as I was on another boat was again a dog of a counterfeiter."

THE GILA MONSTER

By DAVID WALTER CHURCH

Little Inez Basquemento, a Mexican girl I saw while engineering in the southwest, was a merry child (if she had been born in the north she would have been a child; but, being a Mexican, she was a woman). She might have been anywhere from fourteen to sixteen. She played the guitar and sang with a little birdlike voice, jabbered Spanish musically, danced, and her face wore a perpetual smile, which was for every one. But if any person attempted to guy her she would knit her brows and shrink away as though terrified. And once her confidence was lost by a bit of banter her good will could never be regained.

There was a young engineer engaged on the same work as myself out there, at the time fresh from one of the "Teck" schools of the northern states. He was twenty years old, handsome as a picture and as bright as a new brass button. What must he do but make love to Inez with all the recklessness of youth regardless of the consequences both to himself and her! I, who was older, saw his danger and warned him. I knew what was up, for in the evening when the day's work was over I would hear on the Basquemento veranda the twang of Inez's guitar, her little flute voice, her merry laughter mingled with sounds which I recognized as coming from Ben Eggleston, the young man who was sowing the wind to reap the whirlwind.

"You little fool," I would say to him, "don't you know that the girl is a mingling of child and woman—child in experience, woman in development; that she will fall in love with you and then"—

"I'll break it off at once," would be the young fellow's invariable reply. The boy fully intended to keep his resolution when it was made, but gave up trying to do so when it got cold. The next night I would hear the same pleasant sounds on the veranda and knew that they were breeding the same storm.

This went on till the work on that division was finished and we were about to move. Eggleston assured me there wouldn't be any trouble. The girl was such a child that he couldn't believe she had been attracted to him as she might have been if more of a woman. He was going away and would simply bid her goodby as he would any other girl of immature years whose companion he had been.

"My advice to you," I said, "is to do no such thing. Go without saying anything about your going."

He didn't take my advice. The day before leaving he told her in a careless way that the engineering party to which he belonged was going to move its headquarters.

"And I will not see you again?" said the girl, her smile vanishing.

"Perhaps not," replied Ben, not thinking it wise to leave her to look forward to meeting him again. "You'll grow up soon and get married. Then you won't want any young men friends like me."

In order the better to kill in her all expectation of getting any nearer to him he told her he had a girl in the north.

That evening I met Inez carrying a cudgel in one hand and a canvas bag in the other. She wore the same innocent look she had always worn, but I noticed a peculiar glitter in her eye. There was something incongruous in a little girl's carrying a bludgeon, and, naturally fearful for Ben Eggleston, I could not help vaguely connecting the act with the jilting he was giving her. She passed me without looking back, and, taking position behind a tree, I watched her.

She went along, looking about her on the ground as if searching for something. She spent half an hour in this way, I following her, taking a new position now and then where I would not be observed by her. Presently I saw her hit something with her weapon. Then she picked up what looked to me from a short distance like a baby alligator. She held it by the tail, dropped it into the bag, closed the mouth and went away.

I didn't know what it all meant; but, still timorous about Ben, I told him he had better not wait for the moving of the party, but get out at once. He laughed at me and said there was nothing to fear and if there were he wouldn't run from a little Mexican girl who had scarcely given up her doll.

We engineers slept in a long temporary building one story high. That night I was startled by an unearthly yell. Springing out of bed, I ran along to a room where Eggleston and a rodman slept. The window was open, and Eggleston had just struck a light. His roommate was holding one leg and writhing with pain.

"Kill it!" he yelled.

Then I saw a little alligator looking thing on the floor.

"Kill it! It's the Gila monster and has bitten me. I'm gone up."

Inez's actions were explained. She had dropped the reptile in through the window on Ben, she supposed, but really on his roommate. For a week the poor devil howled in agony, then died.

That was years ago. Ben Eggleston has never married. The bare mention of a woman produces on him a temporary insanity.

THE SIREN

By CORA HATHORN SYKES

Each dwelling should be a thing of itself, not containing any one except the family whose home it is. Many a wife and husband have been separated, innocent children made to suffer and sometimes murder done because of a man or a woman going to live with a family of which they were not a part.

The Browns were a humdrum couple, content with each other and their home. When it was decided to have a governess for their children Miss Olive Markam was selected for the purpose. Miss Markam was pretty, and Mrs. Brown should have hesitated before taking her into the sheepfold. Not that the wolf was likely to harm her lambs, but there was a sheep in the family who, though not very tender, was liable to fall a prey to the newcomer. Neither Mrs. Brown nor her husband gave the entrance of Miss Markam into the family a thought so far as danger was concerned. Neither had ever known a pang of jealousy. Mr. Brown was a pudgy, baldheaded man of forty-two; Mrs. Brown was a tall, angular woman but a year his junior. Neither supposed that the other could attract any one else even if so inclined. The governess was but twenty and replied to Mr. Brown's remarks with "Yes, sir," and "No, sir," as a person of an entirely different generation. And yet there was danger in her presence at the Browns'.

Mr. Brown had his own sleeping room, where he might get a quiet night's rest without being disturbed by the rest of the family. One night he wakened from a bad dream and could not go to sleep again. After vainly endeavoring for an hour or more to do so he got up, put on a dressing gown and went downstairs to get a biscuit and a glass of wine, hoping that by thus drawing the blood to his stomach he might return to slumber. He took great care to move softly that he might not awaken any of the family and on reaching the dining room refrained even from striking a light. He found what he wanted in the sideboard and, having partaken of it, was about to return to his room when he felt his hand clasped by a softer one.

Mr. Brown knew Mrs. Brown's hand very well. It was not soft; it was not even round. On the contrary, it was hard and bony. A current shot quickly up his arm and entered—his heart? no, his self esteem, exciting that natural gratification a man who has passed middle life feels in attracting a young woman. The conviction that the governess had fallen in love with him popped into Mr. Brown's head and created there a disturbance at once delightful and terrifying. On the one hand was his home, his wife, his children; on the other, the siren. If he listened to the one the wreck of the others was sure to follow. But had he the power to resist? Mr. Brown felt in his bones that he had not.

All this flashed through Mr. Brown's mind in the two or three seconds that he held the hand in his. Then it was withdrawn, and without sound or farewell the owner passed. With a wildly beating heart he stood, listened, hoped for further manifestation, feared he would receive it, groped for it with outstretched hands, was disappointed, comforted, troubled, pleased and thrilled all at the same time. At last, being convinced that the owner of the hand had gone, he returned to his room.

Mr. Brown lay awake till daylight, a prey to different emotions, then went to sleep and dreamed that he and the governess were floating down a river whose banks were covered with luxuriant foliage and overhung with flowers. She was the same woman, but transfigured to one of transcendent beauty. He bent over the side of the boat and saw his own face reflected in the water. To his surprise, his hair had come back on his head with no gray streaks in it, and his eye had regained the fire of youth.

Then he took her hand in his—the same hand he had held before. There was the same pleasurable thrill without the dread of consequences. The wife of his bosom, so far as his dream was concerned, had no existence; his children were not yet born. He drifted in paradise.

He was awakened by a shake and the words: "Elisha, are you going to sleep all day? Get up!"

It was Mrs. Brown, in dishabille and forming a dreadful contrast with the companion of his dream. Mr. Brown lay a few moments trying to get used to the returned reality, then slowly got out of bed, forced himself into his clothes and went down into the dining room. The family were at breakfast. His oldest daughter, aged fourteen, looked at him mischievously.

"How did you like the ghost, papa?" she asked, her eyes dancing with fun.

"W-h-a-t ghost?"

But he knew before she told him that she had got up in the night for a glass of water, heard him leave his room, followed him and, with better eyes than his, clasped his hand.

"My dear," said Mr. Brown to his wife after breakfast and before going downtown, "I've been thinking that the children will get on better going to school than taught by a governess."

"Perhaps you're right, pa. Anyway, we can't keep Miss Markam after the holidays. She's going to be married."

"Married!"

"Yes, to a very nice looking young fellow, a year older than she. Same difference as between us, dear."

WHEN ABNER GOT MAD

By M. QUAD

Miss Eunice Glasser was a "sorter" old maid, but it was not her fault. Abner Jackson, who was a "sorter" old bachelor, had been courting her for five years without actually popping the question. She lived with her widowed mother in the village, and he worked a little farm just outside.

Abner wasn't lazy. He was just a good natured poke of a man. He was goin' to get married some day, but there was no hurry about it. He always talked as if he intended to marry Eunice, but he didn't come down to details. He didn't ask her to name the day and arrange the bridal tour. Eunice liked Abner and bore with him, but she was getting rather tired of it when her Aunt Hannah came on a visit. Aunt Hannah saw Abner two or three times, understood his nature and then said to her niece:

"Look here, you've got a poke of a man hanging around after you, and it may be ten years more before he'll say anything about marriage. Are you going to put up with it or do something?"

"Why, auntie, what can I do?"

"Get mad at him and make him think he's going to lose you."

"He only laughs when I get mad."

"Then set in and criticise his feet, his nose, his eyebrows. Tell him that he's the homeliest man you ever saw."

"I don't think he'd mind it at all."

"Didn't you ever see him show any temper?"

"Not a bit. He was run over by a drove of hogs once and got up laughing. No, you can't make Abner mad. He's a poke, but an awfully good man."

"And are you going to keep right on for the next fifty years, are you?"

One afternoon three or four days later a vinegar barrel with one head out was left at the house by the grocer to be used as a rain barrel. The house stood on quite a hill, and there was a sharp slope down to the village street. About the hour Abner usually appeared Eunice was sent on an errand to the other side of the village, and when the "poke" arrived Aunt Hannah was the one to greet him. She took him to the corner of the house where the barrel stood and promptly began:

"See here, Mr. Jackson, you've been dawdling around here for years. What are you after?"

"Why—why"— he stammered as he leaned up against the house and could say no more.

"Oh, you can't tell! I knew you couldn't. You've come here almost every night in the week for months and years and squatted yourself down, and what for? Your talk can't interest anybody. The sight of you isn't inspiring. If I was Eunice I'd just as soon have a wooden man around. And yet you come and squat and squat. I ask you, sir, what you mean by such conduct?"

"I—I guess I'll go home," answered Abner, who was too astonished to see straight.

"And I guess you won't," said Aunt Hannah, "at least not until you have explained yourself. I've been looking at you. If I had a cow as homely as you are I'd knock her in the head with the ax. Hump shouldered, bowlegged and feet like an elephant, and yet you come here and squat around and take up a girl's time! Why, man, what can you think of yourself?"

"I'll never come again!" exclaimed Abner in a changed voice.

"That's good. That's what I wanted to hear you say. Go and squat somewhere else. Go and find the homeliest girl in the country to match you. The first time I saw you I knew you was a poke of a man and you hadn't grit enough to push a toad off its nest."

"Woman, be careful! If you aggravate me too much"—

"Aggravate an old poke! Why, man, it would take you three years to get mad, even if you started in tonight."

The next thing she knew she was being lifted off her feet in Abner's strong arms and deposited in the handy barrel. Before she could yelp twice the barrel was whirled on its side and given a kick to start it down the slope. It took an erratic course. It ran to the right a few feet and then shied to the left. It stopped for a moment at a gooseberry bush and then dodged and jumped clear over a crabapple tree. There were yelling and screaming from the inmate of the barrel, but Abner stood and watched the circus and shouted back:

"I'm a poke, am I? I'm a squatter, am I? I've got bowlegs and humped shoulders and feet like an elephant! Gol durn your hide, roll on!"

And the barrel rolled, and Aunt Hannah rolled, and neither of them stopped rolling till the barrel crashed through the fence and brought up against a shade tree in the street. No one was killed. No bones were broken. Aunt Hannah crept out and up to the house and was just finished with the last of the arnica when Miss Eunice came rushing in with radiant face to exclaim:

"I was coming back home—and I met Abner—and he was swearing—and he grabbed me by the arm—and he said he'd break my neck if I didn't go right to the preacher's and be married—and—and"—

"And you went?"

"Yes, and we were married. I had to be. Abner ain't a poke any more, but the awfulest, determinedest man you ever heard of. Why, auntie, he told me to tell you that you could go to thunder and be durned to you!"